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CHURCHES, UNIVERSITIES SEEK ROLE IN HUNGER FIGHT

MADISON, Wis. -- A church-university conference on world hunger ended here in mid-Spring with a call to both institutions to make "North-South relationships" the center of their mission and thinking.

Dr. David Crean, hunger staff officer at the Episcopal Church Center in New York, sponsored a delegation of a dozen Episcopalians from universities, seminaries and policy-study groups to the gathering at the Yahara Center here. The Episcopal Church was among eight denominations sponsoring the National Council of Churches event and Crean served on the planning council.

The three-day event began with a keynote address by Dr. Mahbub ul (cq) Haq, policy director for the World Bank. Daily worship, two symposia, eight workshops and eight seminars led the group through an agenda exploring causes, policies and attitudes that affect world hunger and the role of Churches and universities in those.

Their work and conclusions were summarized in a paper read on the last day by Dr. Alan Geyer of the Washington-based Center for Theology and Public Policy. Geyer described world hunger as "basically a function of North-South relationships -- economic, political and cultural relationships between the richer countries and the poorer countries," and added that "to the extent that universities and churches put those relationships somewhere near the center of their mission, they will have some opportunity to influence the future of Planet Earth."

He asserted that these were "not yet anywhere near the center of mission for either" and bemoaned the fact that academic and ecclesiastical survival had "been getting in the way of strategies for global survival."

He called for reshaping of university curricula and structures to address this need and concluded with a role the churches can play in this effort:

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"The churches must understand and enter into these struggles for the soul of the university which will go on for years to come. They must help to raise questions of lifestyle, not only in a passive, consumerist sense, but in a political activist sense. Basic questions about the shape of domestic and world economic systems must be looked at with ideological self-consciousness -- for myths about markets and planning have much to do with the adequacies of food programs. The churches must identify their own laity in the professional domains of teaching and research in all those fields which relate to poverty and hunger -- which means just about all of them. There are enormous leadership resources within the universities which most denominations have never suspected."

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